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Thanksgiving; its Nature, and Forms of Expression:

A TRIBUTE AND REVIEW.

An Address

DELIVERED AT DRUMMONDVILLE, ONTARIO,

6th NOVEMBER,

BEING THANKSGIVING DAY THROUGHOUT THE DOMINION,

BY

ROBERT THOMSON, LL.D.,

FELLOW OF THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF SCOTLAND; FELLOW OF
THE GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF EDINBURGH; FELLOW OF THE CANA-
DIAN INSTITUTE, TORONTO, ETC.; MINISTER OF CHIPPAWA AND
DRUMMONDVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CANADA.

Ὡς ἐυφραυνομένων πάντων ἡ κατοικία ἐν σοί.—SEPT.

Sicut letantium omnium habitatio est in te.—VULGATE.

All lay springs are in Thee.—Ps. lxxxvii., 7.

TORONTO:

JAMES BAIN & SON, 36 KING STREET EAST.

DRUMMONDVILLE: GEORGE J. DUNCAN; A. LAND.

HAMILTON: D. McLELLAN.

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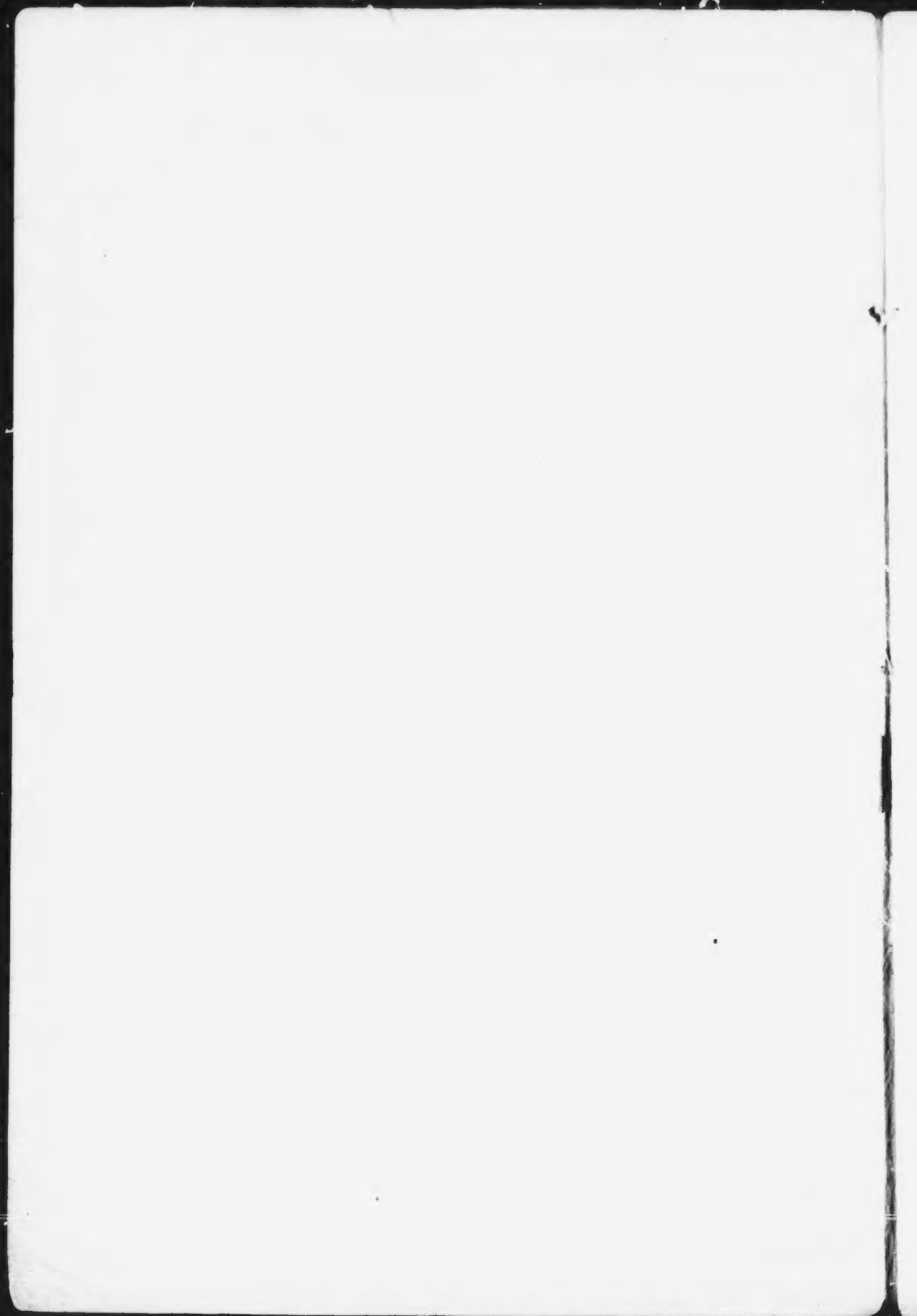
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MDCCCLXXIX.



TO THE
OFFICE-BEARERS AND CONGREGATIONS
OF
CHIPPAWA AND DRUMMONDVILLE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

This Discourse
IS
RESPECTFULLY AND AFFECTIONATELY
INSCRIBED.



Thanksgiving: Its Nature, and Forms of Expression.

I. Chron., xxix., 10-16 : "*Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heaven and the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and Thou art exalted as head above all.*"

"*All things come of Thee, and of thine own have we given Thee,*" etc.

Psalms 1., 14, 15 : "*Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows to the Most High; and call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.*"

IN accordance with the arrangements made by the brethren to whom we owe this united service¹ this morning, and at their request, it has fallen to my lot to address to you, my friends, a few words, which might set before our minds, plainly and simply, some of those numerous topics which call for devout acknowledgment before the presence of the Great Author of all our mercies, on a day set apart for national thanksgiving throughout the Dominion, together with a reference to some at least of the forms which our gratitude should assume, or at any rate

¹ This sermon was preached in the Canada Methodist Church, Drummondville, to the combined Methodist and Presbyterian congregations, as has been the custom on such occasions for some years; the opening services having been conducted by my friend, Rev. M. Swann. It is now published in compliance with the wishes of some who were present on that occasion.

the feelings by which it may appropriately be accompanied.

The duty of thanksgiving, inculcated in the words of our text together with those of the man after God's own heart, expressing the spirit of a truly thankful and devout worshipper, remind us that from the very beginning of his gracious dealings with men, God, instead of leaving the offering of thanks to the sense of spontaneous gratitude on the part of those who were the receivers of his Fatherly beneficence, has always required this as a commanded duty. And the reason of this is not far to seek; for such is the inveterate and well nigh ineradicable tendency of the human heart to self-dependence, or rather to arrogant self-applause,—our natural pride revolting from, and so impatiently rebelling against, the feeling of dependence even upon the living God himself,—that it cannot be restrained within even moderate bounds, without a daily, almost an hourly, crying to our Father in Heaven "Give us this day our daily bread," equally necessary for the body and for the soul. When God threatens his judgments against the pride of the King of Assyria, and to bring down the glory of his high looks, "because he saith, by the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent" (Isa. x. 13); or when He remonstrates, "They take up all of them fishes with the angle; they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag: therefore they rejoice and are glad. Therefore they sacrifice unto their net and burn incense unto their drag, because by them their portion is fat and

their meat plenteous" (Hab. i. 15, 16)—so they reckon—He addresses himself to, and sharply rebukes, this wayward tendency of our fallen nature. There lay the fish, and their fishing instruments, and here were themselves, the fishermen, who certainly had a right to use what they had laboured for, and no one else, they imagined, had any interest whatever in the transaction¹—so easy, so natural, is it for man to use and love the gifts and the creature, and altogether to forget the Giver, his Creator; and delude himself into the belief, that from resources within and of himself, "he is rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing," and that he is really happy, whilst all the time he is "without God in the world" (Eph. ii. 12).

Now, let me remark, that Cain's offering of fruits was rejected by God, not because it was wrong in itself, but solely because in the proud self-righteousness of this primitive Pharisee,—for in the offerings presented by Cain and Abel, we see just the Pharisee and Publican in actual life rather than in a parable—this thank-offering had not been preceded, as the Divine law required, by a sin-offering and contrition of heart, whereupon, first his person would have been accepted, and then his sacrifice. The acknowledgment of the Lord's goodness, then, in granting to us the use and enjoyment of the produce of field, orchard and vineyard, and in blessing the varied departments of industrious labour in civilized life, was systematically enjoined upon the covenant people. "Honour

¹ See also, Deut. viii. 10, 17, 18.

the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase ; so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine" (Prov. iii., 9, 10). The mention of the first fruits, indeed, reminds us of the interesting ceremony by which, under the Hebrew Theocracy, on the second day of the Passover week, the commencement of barley harvest was inaugurated.¹ A sheaf of the first ripe barley was then brought, and waved by the officiating priest, north, south, east and west—denoting thereby, that "the earth was the Lord's, and the fulness thereof,"² He being the absolute lord and proprietor of all—thereby doing homage as his humble and dependent vassals, as the keys of a great city are presented to the Sovereign on the occasion of a royal visit, and graciously returned to the custody of their guardians. This law was of wide extent and applied to all their acquisitions ; so that as at the beginning, so also at the close of the general harvest, loaves baked of the flour of the recently-gathered grain were offered in gratitude to the Lord, who had crowned the labours of the year with his blessing.

We shall not enter into any further exposition of our text beyond merely calling your attention to the fact that these words present a combination familiar to every reader of the Holy Scriptures whereby a command and a promise go together. "Offer unto

¹ I. Cor., xv., 20, 23.

² These words were appropriately selected by the late Prince Consort, and inscribed over the Royal Exchange, London, close by the Bank of England, the heart of the wealthiest city in the world.

God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows to the Most High,"—vows, some of which may, and often have been made under the shuddering apprehension of some grievous personal or family trial or affliction, under which you agonizingly prayed the Lord, that He might be pleased to make this cup pass from you—this beloved child's life given back to you from the very brink of the grave --or that this and the other dearest objects of your affection might not be taken away as with a stroke,—in which case, how differently in certain respects would you henceforth think, and feel, and act. But as the chief butler failed to remember Joseph, but forgot him when the time of his tribulation had come to an end, so do men act towards their highest and best Benefactor. "Lord in trouble they have visited Thee, they poured out a prayer when Thy chastening was upon them," (Isa. xxvi. 16) and only then. But not thus acts the believer who walks with God, and who recalls the exercise of his soul under such circumstances. "We went through fire and water, but Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place. I will go into Thy house with burnt offerings; I will pay Thee my vows which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken when I was in trouble. I will offer unto Thee burnt sacrifices of fatlings, with the incense of rams; I will offer bullocks with goats. Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul" (Ps. lxvi. 12, etc.). The precept is given, partly at least, that the consciousness of having done, or at least tried to do

this, may the better help us to take hold of and lean our hearts upon the promise which is forthwith added, "And call upon me in the day of trouble,"—not as if to invite trouble to come, but because living in a world where, in some shape or another, trouble is certain, sooner or later, to overtake the most prosperous among us all; but come when and how it may—"I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." We are thus saved from the feeling of having acted with the baseness which we so justly despise among earthly acquaintances, who use their friends as seamen use a refuge harbour, never visiting or running into them unless compelled by stress of weather, and to escape shipwreck, and but for which they would probably forget their very existence altogether.

It is in a very different spirit I trust, my friends, that we meet here to-day, when almost a year has elapsed since, on the fourth of December last, we met together for a like object. The period here embraced has been in some respects a highly disastrous one in Great Britain, which so many amongst us are accustomed to regard as the Mother Country; for with a winter of even fiercer severity than our own (for England, that is), there followed a late and ungenial spring-tide, with a bleak summer, while the hopes of the autumn months were nearly blighted by almost incessant rains, almost annihilating in Britain and other parts of Europe the harvest, as well as destroying many lives and much property by terrible inundations. England alone requires to im-

port from other countries, this year more highly favoured than itself, more than fifty millions of bushels of grain, to maintain the average supply of food for the British Islands. To home privations of this kind, seriously aggravating the existing national distress, England has on hand two bloody wars, neither of which can yet be said to be concluded, and one of them perhaps scarcely begun,—wars entered upon for the most trifling reasons, and in opposition to the remonstrances of England's wisest Indian and African Governors and warriors, where even were there victory announced to-morrow, but little glory at the best could accrue to England from vanquishing either the barbarous Zulus on the one hand, or the hardy tribes of Afghanistan or Cabul on the other. Not such were the exploits of the Duke of Wellington, engaged with Nelson, Moore, and other men of fame in breaking the power of Buonaparte within the Spanish Peninsula, or at Waterloo,—the main incident indeed of the disastrous Zulu expedition, in which the English were nearly beaten out of South Africa altogether, having been the tragic and touching death of the last of the Buonapartes who is likely to make much figure in history, who certainly inherited many of the better qualities of his famous ancestor, once the "hammer of the whole earth," and now apparently, both as a dynasty and politically, "broken in pieces" for ever.

In pleasing contrast to this deeply clouded and unattractive picture, the inhabitants of this Domi-

nion at the close of another year, feel constrained to acknowledge the special goodness of God, in not only exempting us from the worst calamities of the Mother Country, but in sending us, along with continued public tranquility, abundance of grain of excellent quality, and within this peninsula in particular, and generally throughout Ontario, such an amount and quality of fruit, as with some minor deductions for the ravages of disease, have rarely been surpassed. No doubt the picture here too is not without its shadow ; for the trade and commerce of Canada are only now at last beginning slowly to emerge from a depression more severe and long continued, than it has been the lot of our oldest merchants to experience for a lengthened period. The revival shows itself despite of the sudden collapse of more than one Public Bank, to the ruin of multitudes of unfortunate shareholders, and the utter destruction for the time being, of all mutual confidence and commercial enterprise. Let us hope that the period of trial has not been without its salutary effects; and may our future both as a nation and as individuals evidence that we have not suffered these things in vain.

Hebrew history tell us of the ~~daughter of a hero~~, who, on becoming the ~~wife of a hero~~,—herself also a noble-hearted woman, who fully realized the joy her father derived from bestowing¹ rather than receiving or possessing,—in answer to his question, “What wilt thou?” replied, “Give me a blessing, for

¹See Acts xx. 35.

thou hast given me a south land; give me also ~~springs of water.~~ And he gave her the upper springs and the nether springs."¹ These are commonly regarded as symbols of both the temporal, and the yet more precious spiritual blessings which are alike the gift of our Heavenly Father, the union of both which is essential to our ~~true and only blessedness.~~ Are there any here this day present amongst ourselves, who although they may have been enriched by "the fatness of the earth from beneath, and plenty of corn and wine," yet having never yet earnestly sought or obtained "the dew of heaven from above," the ~~life-giving grace of the~~ Spirit of God, possess as yet only the nether springs of earth, but want the upper springs of heavenly grace, and thus have never yet known the true and only real riches? Beware, I beseech you, of the poisonous and deadening effect upon the soul of unchecked worldly prosperity in ~~steeling the heart and its sym-~~ pathies, not only ~~against the widow, the fatherless and the stranger, or the claims even of wife and children,~~ but also of the perishing heathen at home and abroad, the salvation of the lost, the bloodless triumphs of that kingdom of truth and righteousness of which the Lord taught us to pray that it might come, "on earth even as it is in heaven." What is the natural drift and tendency of such unsanctified and unblessed accumulations, for wealth they are not? Our Lord himself answers the question: "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully; and

¹ Judges i. 14. 15.

he thought within himself saying, what shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do; I will pull down my barns and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ~~Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry.~~ But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee; then, whose shall those things be which thou hast provided? So is he, that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke xii., 16, etc.). In pleasing contrast with this picture, we quote the well-known lines of the most Christian of all the domestic poets of England.

*Live
at ease*

But O, Thou bounteous Giver of all good,
Thou art of all thy gifts thyself the crown!
Give what Thou canst, without Thee we are poor,
And with Thee rich, take what Thou wilt away.¹

And this brings me to the obligation to offer thanks, as especially resting upon those who, during the bygone year, have either ~~for the first time~~ in their lives been put in possession of the true riches of which we have been speaking, viz.: been reconciled to God through the blood of His dear Son by the power of the Holy Ghost, or who have experienced such ~~conscious establishment~~ and confirmation in the truth previously less perfectly realized, as really amounts to primary conversion. What a blessedness to be put by God himself among his own

¹ Cowper's *Task*, V., "Winter Morning Walk" (last lines).

children (Jer. iii. 19), who are kept by his mighty power through faith unto salvation,—none being able to pluck them out of their Father's hand—made heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ! How insignificant in comparison of such a privilege appear the most lordly possessions of earth, or the proudest titles of heraldry conferred by any earthly Sovereign! "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on you, that you should be called the sons of God."

Let me remind you, that as Paul's first question on his conversion was, "Who art thou Lord?" so the very next one was, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" What is written in the law? "Son, daughter, go work to-day in my vineyard,"—the vineyard of your own heart no doubt, but simultaneously with that, it may be also, a summons to care for the yet more neglected vineyards of some around you. The Master asks, "What do ye more than others?" who make no profession of love to Him—"do not even the publicans the same?" Let it not be your aim, as alas! it apparently is of some professors, to render the line which divides the Church from the world as invisible and almost as unreal as possible; to approach as close as may be to the verge of the precipice without falling over it; to swim across the treacherous whirlpool without being drawn under into its frightful depths; to sport and tamper with the fiercely rushing rapids, without being swept over the merciless and relentless cataracts! Be it your determination to dread no

imputation of singularity that may be incurred by following the Lord wholly (Numb. xiv. 24; Deut. i. 36), and by courageously acting out your conscientious convictions. Let the trumpet give forth no uncertain sound, like a man halting between two opinions, to whom the Lord will say, "I would thou wert cold or hot" (Rev. iii. 15). And to these who have recently passed from death unto life, how pleasant is the duty of giving thanks to the Lord. The temporal mercies God has been pleased to bestow upon them they learn to use, "not as a pedestal for pride, but as steps on the throne of God upon which to kneel, look upwards and adore." "Praise and ~~thanksgiving~~"—or as good Matthew Henry says, ~~thanksgiving~~—for while thanksgiving is good, ~~thanksgiving~~ *living* is far better—"should always follow prayers answered and blessings received, as the mists of earth's gratitude rise when the sun of heaven's love warms the ground." Has the Lord been gracious to us, and heard the voice of our supplications? Then offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, the fruit of your lips giving thanks to His name—

A soul redeemed demands a life of praise.

"Deny not the tribute of thanks to Him who has given us the desire of our hearts, lest we resemble the nine lepers who forgot to return thanks, and though purged from the leprosy of the flesh, retained the worse leprosy of ingratitude for the grace which had cured them."¹

¹ This, and the two immediately preceding sentences, marked with

Lastly, in view of the numerous crimes and acts of unnatural violence that happen around us, awakening the apprehensions of every thoughtful and patriotic mind; the many Elis, who when their children forsake the way of righteousness make but feeble or no efforts to restrain them, and in whose hands that parental authority, for the wise exercise of which God commended his servant Abraham,¹ degenerates into a mere shadow or nonentity, let parents, ministers, and Sabbath school teachers combine to redouble their prayers and efforts, to train up the coming generation in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. To have a church in every home was the aim of our blessed Lord and his apostles. In a well-ordered family we recognize the germ and promise of a well-ordered and prosperous Church and State; for the future citizens and members of each respectively, will be just what the training of the parental roof and of the public schools shall have made them. Let the odious vice of intemperance be decisively and systematically discouraged by the diligent use of all those wise preventatives, of general culture and the formation of moral and intellectual tastes which, by the grace of God, will elevate

inverted commas, I quote from the Daily "Morning" Readings of the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon, both because of their appropriateness, and to afford me an opportunity of commending to my readers, which I do very strongly, both these morning and evening meditations, and the whole works of that distinguished preacher, to whose eloquence I have listened with more than pleasure, and to whom the cause of the Gospel is largely indebted. *Floreat semper.*

¹Gen. xviii. 19.

the young above the reach of its degrading allurements. Unquestionably, the safest course for every Christian man and woman is to practise the habit of entire abstinence, under ordinary circumstances, from all intoxicating drinks whatever,—a practice which, under God, has been the means of preventing the ruin (for prevention is always wiser than cure) and also of rescuing from ruin, thousands of the most degraded captives of Satan.¹ In the fresh ingenuousness and true manliness of our youth, their modesty, truthfulness and purity of speech and life,—reverence for age and respect for parents—in habits of active industry and self-reliance, and, above all, in “the fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom,” the Christian, under God, looks hopefully and fearlessly forward to the future of our country. For who can read aright the records of every civilized community that ever existed, without recognizing the fact that, godliness is the chief defence and security of a nation’s liberties and prosperity; while, on the other hand, irreligion, neglect of God’s word and ordinances, Sabbath profanation, sure to be followed sooner or later by vice or infidelity, gradually, but surely, sap the foundations of society, and threaten the very existence of all that we hold sacred and precious? Not in vain does Scripture affirm that

¹ As originally delivered, I related here an incident in the history of the well-known Greek scholar, Professor R. Porson, of Cambridge University, Great Britain, which however truthfully sad as a warning, I here omit for the honour of literature. A purer and better tone of character now usually distinguishes our men of letters than existed in the days of King George III.

"Righteousness exalteth a nation, while sin is the reproach," and eventually also, the certain ruin "of any people." "The nation and kingdom that will not serve God shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted."

Never let us then remove "the ancient landmarks which our fathers have set." We will wait in vain, if we look to the shallow and pretentious, but really contemptible and unphilosophical scepticism of a few superficial sciolists in our own time, both in England and America, to provide us with any substitute for that blessed Revelation of saving truth and mercy, which they profess to decry, and so vainly attack. While true to the distinctive principles of the Church to which we conscientiously belong, and of which we are members, let us look with a fraternal eye upon the godly in other communions than our own, taking for our motto, "IN ESSENTIALS, UNITY; IN MINOR AND NON-ESSENTIAL MATTERS, LIBERTY; AND IN ALL THINGS, CHARITY, THE LOVE THAT NEVER FAILETH." And on a day of united Thanksgiving, when, from the Governor-General downwards, all ranks are met together for a similar object, can we find a more patriotic aspiration than in the words of the Psalmist? (Ps. cxliv. 7):

"Send thine hand from above; rid me and deliver me out of great waters, from the hand of strange children;

Whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood.

I will sing a new song unto Thee, O God : upon a psaltery and an instrument of ten strings will I sing praises unto Thee.

It is He that giveth salvation unto kings : who delivereth David his servant from the hurtful sword.

Rid me, and deliver me from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood :

That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth ; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace :

That our garners may be full, affording all manner of store : that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our streets :

That our oxen may be strong to labour ; that there be no breaking in, nor going out ; that there be no complaining in our streets.

HAPPY IS THAT PEOPLE, THAT IS IN SUCH A CASE :
YEA, HAPPY IS THAT PEOPLE, WHOSE GOD IS THE
LORD !"

